

POINT BREAK

Shooting script, 1991 · **THE FULL READ** · 25 September 2026

Thanks for the read. I give every script two reads, and the second one is for notes. I hope the notes have something of value for you.

This is a big, physical draft with a clear subject, a man who can't stand to lose meeting a man who has stopped keeping score, and most of its best storytelling happens without a word of dialogue. Where it pulls two ways is on why Utah won't take the shot, and the last page inherits that (more below).

None of this is prescriptive. It is one reader's experience of the draft: what I thought and felt, and why I think that happened. Where I point at a direction, it is a direction, not the answer. It's your story.

Terms and shorthands I use sometimes in my notes. Apologies if these are obvious things to you - I just like to cover all my bases

On the nose: a character says what they think or feel, or says the theme, straight out, with nothing left for the audience to work out. When something that should be expressed more

subtly in the script isn't. E.g. text that should be subtext, bare expressions of feeling, railroading the reader with stage direction to achieve something you didn't earn with character or story.

Button: the last beat of a scene. The moment it ends on.

Stock: a line or beat I have seen enough that I would call it common or overdone. Look at how you can make it more unique. This is my opinion. It is not gospel.

Plant / pay off: set something up early so it means something later. A plant with no pay off is a loose thread that needs to be cut or better woven into the story.

Make a meal of it: commit to a thread and give it the pages it needs, as against leaving it half built. An invitation to add to something or develop it further.

The work you've done well

I used to be awful at taking good notes. I got good at taking the bad ones, because that's the job, and I figured the good ones had nothing to teach me. I was wrong. A good note tells you what's working, so you know what to protect in the rewrite. And we don't get many chances to celebrate, so take them when they come. (Apologies in advance for the compliments. I learned to take them late, so I'm clumsy handing them out.)

Overall, three things. The action writing is the strongest craft in the draft: short, concrete and funny, and I never lost track of anyone in a fight. The Utah and Bodhi relationship carries the whole movie, and it builds from start to finish. And the biggest story moments are told in pictures, with no one explaining them. The moments where I saw it most:

pp. 2-5 The opening. You cut a surfer against a bank job in slow motion, and I believe the robbery is real until the flak vest lights up “like a pinball machine.” It's a training exercise. The opening is efficient and it hooks me. In four pages you set up the hero, his skill, and the need to win he shows when he re-triggers the cadet's vest on p. 5. You also set the movie's rhythm, water scenes against gun scenes, before anyone says much of anything.

- p. 9** Pappas, blindfolded, complains about his new partner to his new partner, and Utah plays along. “Punk. Quarterback Punk.” A great introduction for the two of them. It’s funny, it tells me who each man is, and the back-and-forth it starts runs through the rest of the script.
- p. 15** “The air got dirty and the sex got clean.” Nine words and I know Pappas: an old agent who has watched the city change around him and doesn’t like what it turned into. Then the scene ends on his theory that the robbers are surfers, and that’s what sends Utah into the water.
- p. 17** Pappas on the desk in a surf crouch, the night guard walks in, and Utah says “I think he needs a vacation.” Great button. It’s also a plant: Pappas is the first one to believe in the surfer theory, and he’s the one who dies for the case.
- p. 18** The kid in the surf shop. Six speeches of sales patter, and every one is in his own voice. He also states the theme, “Surfin’s the source. It’ll change your life.” Because it comes from a teenager selling a board, it plays as a joke and not a message. (I’d buy whatever he’s selling.)
- pp. 23-24** Utah’s drowning speech and “Bye.” His need to win is charming here, the one time in the script it is, and it’s why I believe Tyler would give him a second look.
- p. 56** Utah under the window, a lawnmower two feet from his face, watching the arsenal come out of the closet “Like a silent pantomime under the ROAR OF THE MOWER.” One machine gives you suspense and a joke at once, and you bring it back on p. 60.

- p. 60** “Speak into the microphone.” Pappas has just shot the lawnmower dead. Great line. It’s funny, it’s exactly how Pappas talks, and it gets the laugh because it’s so calm, right after he’s put two rounds into the mower.
- p. 63** The fog. Utah sees four surfers on the beach and says “There are four of them.” He knows they’re the Ex-Presidents, and so do I, because you planted the clues: the robber who moons the bank camera on p. 11, the tan on p. 16, the robberies that only happen in summer on p. 17. I put it together at the same moment he does, and no one has to explain it. The best-built moment in the draft.
- pp. 68-69** The robbery happens behind Utah, out of focus, while he’s buying meatball sandwiches. Funny and tense at the same time, which is hard to pull off.
- p. 75** Utah has Bodhi in the Reagan mask at twenty feet, and he empties the magazine into the sky. No dialogue, and it shows me the central question of the movie: he can’t shoot this man. On p. 76 Pappas asks why he didn’t take the shot and Utah says “I don’t know.” You don’t explain it, and you don’t need to.
- p. 86** The freefall. Utah won’t pull his ripcord until Bodhi pulls his. He’d rather hit the ground than lose. Bodhi ends it by pulling Utah’s cord for him. The best action scene in the script, because the danger comes out of who these two men are: Utah’s need to win creates it, and Bodhi’s generosity ends it.

p. 109 “You’ll do this for me, won’t you Johnny? Haven’t I earned this much?” Bodhi’s last move is to ask, not to fight or run. All movie he’s the one who gives - he saves Utah at the shower, he pulls Utah’s ripcord - and here, for once, Utah is the one with something to give. The right last scene for the two of them.

The characters I liked most, and why. Pappas, because he’s funny, tired and good at his job, and every scene with him feels real. Bodhi, because he’s charming until p. 87, when he becomes a real threat and I believe it. The kid in the surf shop, for the reasons above. And Tyler when she’s angry, because that’s when she’s most herself.

Throughline of your story and where it can go

What the story is going for

As I read it, this is the story of a man who gets pulled over to the other side, and the undercover thriller is how you tell it. Utah has always played to win, in football until his knee went (p. 32) and now at the Bureau, but they're games other people built for him. The case sends him into Bodhi's world to catch a crew of bank robbers, and there he finds the first thing he's ever wanted for himself: the water, and the freedom Bodhi lives by. The rest of the story is the fight between that want and his job, and the ending is where he has to choose.

The strongest storyline: Utah and Bodhi

The relationship between Utah and Bodhi is the strongest storyline, and it has a clear pattern. Utah keeps pushing harder - the fights, the chases, the dare in the freefall - and Bodhi keeps answering with generosity. He pulls Utah out of the fight at the shower (p. 39) and pulls Utah's ripcord for him (p. 86). Four times Utah has Bodhi and doesn't take him, each for a different reason. He can't shoot him (p. 75). He blocks Pappas's shot (p. 100). He needs both hands to save himself in the fall (pp. 105-106). He lets him go (p. 109). The pattern builds without repeating, and it's the backbone of the movie.

Storylines that could carry more: Tyler and Pappas

Two storylines could carry more of the last act. Tyler teaches Utah to surf, and she's the first person to see him changing (p. 52). After p. 78 she has almost nothing to do (more in the notes). Pappas is the voice against Bodhi's world ("all bank robbers are losers" on p. 43), but he only meets Bodhi face to face once before the gunfight, on the stairs on p. 40, and there he's playing a part. A real scene between either of them and Bodhi late in the script would give the ending more weight.

Notes

Core note to address

The script hasn't decided why Utah doesn't arrest

Bodhi. Is it a choice he makes with his eyes open, or something that happens to him that he doesn't understand? The two halves of the draft answer it differently.

Here's where I felt it. On p. 63 Utah recognizes the Ex-Presidents in the fog. From there to p. 87 he knows who they are and that they're about to leave town, and he doesn't call it in or arrest them. Pappas says the banks are closed and they'll watch the crew in the morning (p. 66). The next morning Utah asks for backup and wants Pappas to make the call ("Harp won't listen to me." on p. 67), Pappas talks them both out of it, and the two of them stake out one bank alone (pp. 67-68). I went along with it as character, Pappas's pride after Dietz and Utah's attraction to Bodhi's world, but I noticed I was going along with it. For twelve pages Utah acts like a bad cop, and I'm ahead of him, waiting for him to do his job. Then on p. 75 he has Bodhi in his sights and can't shoot, and that moment is clear. It's who he is.

The ending pays for the confusion. The last scene asks me to feel Utah letting Bodhi go as grace, with Tyler's tears and "He rode it all the way." Nine pages earlier Bodhi makes a joke over Pappas's body. I felt the grace as something the script wants, not something Utah feels.

Two roads, and the draft needs to pick one.

- If it's a choice, pp. 63-75 are where we watch Utah make it, and Pappas's death on p. 100 is the price of a decision we saw him take.
- If it's something he can't control, "I don't know." on p. 76 is the truth, and pp. 63-75 need something outside Utah that keeps him from making the arrest, so the audience isn't twelve pages ahead of him.

Either one is a movie. Right now the draft has scenes from both and connects neither.

The other direction you could go if you wanted

Keep the twelve pages and make them the point. In this version Utah doesn't act like a cop on pp. 63-87 because he has already stopped being one. Bodhi says it on p. 109: "You never were..." Handing the call to Pappas is Utah finding a way not to make it himself, and the script already points at that on p. 66: "Angelo looks at the conviction in the other agent's eyes." If this is the version you want, those pages need more of what's going on inside Utah. Right now he's alone with what he knows once, on pp. 78-79, and that scene is about Tyler. It's the hardest version to pull off, and the last page works against it: "final justice" on p. 109 and "whitewater grave" on p. 110 read as a verdict, and this version doesn't have one.

Tied to the core note

pp. 65-67 The day Utah spends tailing Bodhi happens off the page, and it's the scene the script is missing. Tower Records, lunch at Patrick's Road House, the Assured Trust, the storage unit. Utah tells Pappas all of it in a

driveway. That's a whole day of Utah alone with what he knows, watching Bodhi and not picking up the phone. It's what the core note asks for, and the draft has it but doesn't show it. One direction: put some of that day on the page, so what he tells Pappas becomes the version with things left out. It costs a page or so, and it gives you the decision on screen, whichever way you make it.

p. 100 Utah blocks Pappas's shot, Pappas dies because of it,

and no one on the page ever says so. "Angelo! Don't fire!" Pappas raises his gun to the sky, and Roach, still alive, gets a second shot. The cause and effect is exact, and it's the hardest thing in the script: the hero's flaw kills his friend. What I missed was any acknowledgement of it, from Utah or anyone. The draft gives Pappas a life - three months to retirement on p. 9, Miss Deer and the ouzo on pp. 64-65 - and after p. 100 no one says his name again. Utah's reason for blocking the shot is also open. It could be Tyler, because Bodhi is the only one who knows where she is (p. 88), or it could be Bodhi himself, and the script doesn't choose. Then Utah rides to Mexico with Roach's shotgun on him for three pages (pp. 101-104) and Angelo never comes up. His hand on Angelo's crewcut on p. 101 is the right gesture. It's missing a name. A line somewhere between the airstrip and the beach costs almost nothing and gives Pappas a place in the last act.

pp. 107-110 The script skips a year, and the last page argues with itself.

I felt the time jump as a loss. In that year Utah has left the Bureau ("you're a citizen now" on p. 108) and answered Pappas's question for himself, and what I get is a limp and a beard. The exchange with Bodhi is strong. "I'm not FBI anymore." / "You never were..." says the

whole movie in a few words. What's missing is any sign that letting Bodhi go costs Utah something. Tyler's tears and "He rode it all the way." tell me it's grace. The lieutenant on the road tells me it's a crime. And Utah's last line is the surfers' line - Roach says it on p. 47 and Bodhi on p. 101 - from a man who picked up their slang as cover (p. 33), and I didn't see him get there. One more thing, whichever way you go: Bodhi's only acknowledgement of his dead is "It went bad, brah. Real bad." If he's going to be mourned, the draft could give him one more sentence about Grommet. A few lines cost you almost nothing and give the reader an ending they can weigh.

Big picture

pp. 34-62 The Razorhead lead runs twenty-eight pages on suspects I never believed in. As action, the raid is the tightest writing in the draft. As story, it felt like a long detour whose only job is to be wrong. Pappas says as much on p. 43, and between p. 34 and Dietz on p. 62 the Ex-Presidents barely come up. What the detour gives you is worth keeping: Utah's first time under fire, Bodhi saving him at the shower, the humiliation with Dietz. The question is how many pages it needs to get there. Make a meal of the Razorheads, or find the shortest way through them. The hair collection (pp. 35-37), the stakeout (pp. 42-44) and the build to the raid are where I'd look. It costs some of the raid's build-up and a couple of good jokes. It gives you back ten to fifteen pages, and the movie stops spending a quarter of its length on a lead I don't believe. (One scene, three sizes, in the exercises, is made for this.)

Character

pp. 12-13 The Bureau is a floor full of agents with the same attitude, and that makes leaving it cheap. Cole and Munoz are the same character split in two, a sneer from p. 12 until Cole gets stabbed on p. 60. Harp plays the same note in every scene, and his best scene is his first, the food groups on p. 7, which Utah wins. The story needs the Bureau to be the thing Utah gives up, and the draft makes that easy by making the Bureau worthless, so “I’m not FBI anymore.” on p. 109 reads as an escape, not a choice. One agent who is good at the job and decent to Utah would make leaving cost him. Pappas is that agent, and he’s dead by then. The punch on p. 97 belongs here too. I laughed, and then I felt the laugh take weight off Pappas’s death three pages later. Merging Cole and Munoz, and letting someone in the building be right once, costs a laugh or two and gives the ending a price.

pp. 24-25 The first thing Utah does after Tyler saves his life is watch her change through binoculars from fifty yards, and I didn’t like him for it. I think the script wants that. “UTAH WATCHES IMPASSIVELY.” tells me he’s working, and the scene ends with him writing her plate number on a Tastee-Freeze bag. But the paragraph spends its words on her body and the “Houdini act” with her top, so it reads as leering, not police work, and I couldn’t tell whether it was the agent in him or the quarterback. Tyler never finds out about the binoculars.

If the watching is the point, the paragraph could be about him watching, not about what he sees. It costs half a page of her body and gives you a scene about him.

p. 30 Bodhi gets explained before he gets shown. Tyler labels him twice before he speaks (“They call his the Bodhisattva.” / “The modern savage.”) and his first words are “Hey Tyler!” She describes him again on p. 46 (“The sea is the woman in his life.”) and on p. 48 (“He’ll take you to the edge... and past it.”), which announces the second half of the movie. Then Bodhi does it himself, on the nose, on p. 41, p. 47, p. 82 and p. 90. On p. 41 Utah undercuts it with the chanting line. On p. 90 nothing undercuts it, and his language there is the most elevated in the script. Bodhi is at his best when he’s amused and at his worst when he’s wise. The p. 50 speech is the exception, because it turns into coaching and the ride follows. The pictures of Bodhi are the character - the pier pilings, the rescue, the ripcord, the walk into the water - and “Something crosses her face.” on p. 30 already does what the labels do. The speeches that turn into action are worth their place. The ones that are only philosophy are worth a hard look. It costs some philosophy and gives you a Bodhi we watch, not one we listen to.

pp. 46-47 Roach, Nathaniel and Grommet are one voice with three names. The war story on the deck is four surfers finishing each other’s sentences, and I liked the rhythm of it, but what separates them is business, not voice: Nathaniel’s laugh, Grommet’s head-butt. Grommet becomes a person when he’s dying on p. 95. Roach has a personality once, as Nixon on p. 10, and it’s meaner than anything he says with the mask off. If the crew is the family Utah joins on p. 85 (“Part of something.”), the

family could use one scene where they're people and not a pack. One trait each that isn't slang would do it, and the slang can stay. Then "I ain't gonna see 30." on p. 48 hits harder on p. 96, because we know who said it. It costs a scene and gives you three deaths I feel instead of one.

Story

p. 49 **The evidence points at Bodhi's crew twice, and no one in the script notices.** The hair on p. 34 is LBJ's ponytail, and Nathaniel is introduced "ponytailed and powerfully built" on p. 31. The lab matches the hair to "Latigo Beach." on p. 37, and the Razorheads surf there, so the lead goes to them. Then on p. 49 Bodhi takes the whole crew night surfing at Latigo Beach, and Utah paddles out with the men the evidence describes. I read it either as the best irony in the script or as an accident. If the audience is meant to catch it, make it catchable, and p. 63 becomes the moment Utah stops refusing to see. If Utah catches it and says nothing, that's the choice road from the core note, and your own plot hands it to you. Either one costs a line or a look, and gives the recognition on p. 63 a history.

Dialogue

- p. 5** Two strangers describe the hero in his first three pages. The man with the binoculars calls him the big college quarterback on p. 3 before we meet him, and the cadet on p. 5 gives us his name and his flaw in one breath: “Guys like you will do anything to win!” When Utah re-triggers the vest a moment later, it shows the flaw, and shows it better. Then Bodhi says it on p. 50 (“Always trying to win.”) and again on p. 82 (“you’ll sacrifice anything to win”), so the draft states its hero’s flaw three times in dialogue. Bodhi can keep both of his. They’re his read on Utah, and they lead into the ride and the gun. The cadet’s line is a thesis statement, and angry men don’t talk in thesis statements. Let the cadet’s anger do the talking and let Bodhi be the first to name it. It costs a laugh on the first pages and gives the audience the pleasure of working Utah out.
- p. 52** A handful of stock lines, in a script whose dialogue is specific everywhere else, and they cluster where people are being sincere. “I can’t describe what I’m feeling.” on p. 52 is the line every love scene has, and Utah has been funny with her in every scene until then. If he tried to be funny and failed, that could be the change she’s pointing at. “You did good today.” on p. 61 is the one line of Pappas’s that anyone could have said. “Don’t you have a soul?” on p. 78 is the stock version of what Tyler has just said better. “I’ve never known anyone like you before in my life” on p. 79 turns a man who can’t say what he

means into a man who says it fine. And “I got three months left to retirement” on p. 9 is the genre’s oldest warning that a man is about to die. It may be exactly the clock you want the audience to hear, but know that they’ll hear it. None of these sinks a scene. Each is a place where I heard the writer, not the character. Each change costs a sentence and gives you the character back.

Relationships

pp. 25-
26

Tyler's file gives the script two things, and the draft pays off neither. The first is the kidnapping: "She ties some guy up. Nude. Leaves the scene and fails to return for 24 hours." Big laugh, and no one mentions it again, including Tyler, so it's a loud plant with no pay off. The second is quieter and bigger. Utah reads "Both parents deceased. Plane crash. San Diego, '84." off her screen, says "Yeah, definitely.", and then tells her his own parents "got killed in a car wreck" (p. 27). He builds his way in out of her grief. When she finds his badge (pp. 77-78) she asks "did your parents really die in a car crash?" and he says no, but she never learns where the story came from, and neither does anyone else. The dead-parents speech is the heart of the script. It describes a man who lived for other people and wanted something of his own, which is Utah exactly, and he tells it as a lie. The draft pays off the lie and never the truth in it. Two directions. She works out on p. 78 what he borrowed, which costs a few lines and gives the fight a real wound. Or the made-up story turns out to be the true one, said by her or by him, which costs a moment late in the script and gives Utah a change someone else can see.

p. 77 Twice he answers her with sex instead of words. On pp. 52-53 she says "You don't have to." and he kisses her. On p. 77 she asks "What? What do you want to tell me?" and he lowers her to the bathroom floor. That's a real character note - a man who can't say what he means and

has found a way not to - and I couldn't tell whether you meant it. If you did, she could notice it once, and p. 77 is the place, because she's asking him straight out. If you didn't, one of the two scenes could use a different exit. Either costs a line, and it gives the scene where she shoots the pillow a fuse the audience saw lit.

p. 78 Tyler's last line of consequence is on p. 78, and she still has thirty pages, a kidnapping and a knife at her throat to go. "did your parents really die in a car crash? DID THEY?!" is the right question for her. She starts with the badge and ends at the lie that was personal, and it's her best scene. After it she's a silent tape in a van and, a year later, "John, they're here." On p. 106 she runs out of the dust and puts her arms around the man who is the reason she was taken, and says nothing. There's also a triangle the script knows about and never plays: "She was my woman, once." on p. 88, and her tears on the beach on p. 110 with nothing in the thirty pages before to support them. She never confronts Bodhi. One direction is giving her a line on p. 106, and it doesn't have to be to Utah. Another is a moment between her and Bodhi before the end. Each costs a line or two and gives Tyler her last thirty pages.

Setting

p. 44 The world is told to me through Tyler and shown to me once, in the den. “He rents it for the summer. Bodhi always gets some slick place and throws it open to every surf burnout around. Most a these guys can’t keep a job. When the swell comes, they’re gone, they have to ride.” That’s the case theory - money no one can explain, gone when the summer ends, what Pappas worked out on p. 17 - coming from the woman teaching him to surf, and Utah doesn’t react to it. Then the den on p. 48, “the only personalized space we have seen in the house”, does in one picture what a page of dialogue couldn’t: Maori masks, a shark’s jaw, Nietzsche and Marx and Forsyth on one shelf, and a wall of photographs that plants the skydiving. The rest of the world - the house on the cliff, Neptune’s Net, the Razorhead house with the motorcycle in the living room - comes across fast and concrete, and I saw all of it. One look from Utah on p. 44, the cop hearing the case in the middle of a party, would give the setting a job in the plot. It costs nothing on the page and gives you a scene that works twice.

Visual storytelling

p. 53 The action writing is the strongest craft in this draft, and it has one habit that works against it: the sentence after a picture that tells me what the picture meant. “Their moment of harmony with the sea will be honored.” on p. 53, after a shark that was a fine picture on its own. “The mental warfare escalates.” on p. 81. “the bloody wreckage of his ego game” on p. 94, which judges Bodhi for me. “solemnly waits for the universe to deliver final justice” on p. 109. Each time, the picture already did the job. When the narrator jokes - “which was Roach’s. I think.” on p. 84 - it’s a pleasure, and that voice should stay. When it states the emotion or the theme, the writer is standing between the reader and the picture. Keep the jokes and lose the verdicts. It costs a few sentences you like and gives the reader the picture, and the last page is where that counts most.

Logic questions

I'm not sure how deep you want to go on these, so here they are as questions, the kind an audience asks in the car on the way home. Each has more than one good answer.

pp. 19-21 A Razorhead punches Utah and cuts his leash on day one. I bought the punch, not the knife. A stranger pulling a blade over a ding, in the lineup, with no one reacting, read to me like the script needed a villain early. And then the question: a federal agent is assaulted with a knife by a man he can identify, and does nothing about it until a hair sample points at that man's beach seventeen pages later. Does Utah want him for it? If yes, the hair match on p. 37 leads to a face he already hates, which costs a line and gives the false lead a motive. If the knife isn't needed on p. 20, Warchild's blade at Utah's throat on p. 60 becomes the first one, which costs some early menace and gives p. 60 its edge.

p. 32 How famous is Johnny Utah? Bodhi knows him on sight - "Johnny Utah. Ohio State, all-conference." on p. 31 - and he's undercover under his own name. Either he's famous, and going undercover as himself is a risk someone at the Bureau should have raised, or he isn't, and Bodhi knowing him on sight says something about Bodhi, which is the more interesting read. The timeline asks the same question from the other side. The Rose Bowl was three years ago, then "Two years of surgery." then law school, then the top two percent of his class at Quantico

(p. 6), and he's twenty-five on p. 18. That's more years than he has. A younger Rose Bowl or a shorter road fixes the arithmetic. Either costs a line and gives you a reader who stops counting.

- p. 84** When did Bodhi know? The tape of Tyler on p. 87 is a night shot, and the only night between her leaving on p. 78 and the airstrip is the one that ends with Bodhi at Utah's door on p. 79. So the pickup on pp. 80-82, the checkbook, the Casull, and the parachute roulette on p. 84 were most likely played by a man who already knew he was talking to an agent. Fine if you want the audience to re-read them, and they're better scenes read that way. The question is whether the script knows when the moment is. Fixing it for yourself costs nothing on the page. Letting the audience see it, with one look before p. 87, costs a beat and gives you a second viewing.
- p. 88** Rosie is a "mechanism" who can't be reached because "where they're going there's no phones", and on p. 103 he's called off by walkie-talkie in two lines. Is he a mechanism or a man on a radio? If the radio stays, the p. 88 speech contradicts p. 103, and losing the mechanism speech costs some menace and gives you a threat that holds. If the speech stays, the plane needs another way to call him off, which costs a beat and gives Rosie back his menace.
- pp. 90-94** Who is LBJ? The evidence says Nathaniel: LBJ moons the camera on p. 11, LBJ's ponytail is the hair on p. 34, Nathaniel is the one with the ponytail (p. 31) and the one who moons in the fog (p. 63). Then in the van on p. 90 "Nathaniel becomes KENNEDY." and "Grommet transforms into LBJ.", p. 93 calls him

“NATHANIEL/JFK”, and in the shootout on p. 94 the page calls him “NATHANIEL/LBJ” in the same beat as Grommet/LBJ. Either the masks were shuffled for the last job, which is worth a line because the audience has been tracking them, or the van has them backwards. The line costs nothing, and getting it right gives the fog on p. 63 its proof.

- p. 92** Pappas on p. 12: “Never go for the vault. They never get greedy.” So when Roach sprints for it on p. 92 the plant pays off, and Bodhi helps, telling Miss Jennings to open the inner gate. I didn’t know why. Utah says it himself on p. 93, “You’re breaking your own rules”. Is it Bodhi’s call, last job, take it all? Or Roach’s greed, and Bodhi losing control of the crew for the first time? Either is the character, and either is one line in the van. It costs a line and gives the vault a reason, and the deaths that follow a cause.
- p. 96** Harp says “Three men dead. One of them a cop.” I count two on the page: the off-duty cop and Grommet. The guard is shot in the shoulder. If a third man dies off the page, a word would tell us who. If not, the number is doing a job the scene can do without. Either way it costs a word and gives Harp’s accusation the weight of a fact.

How it feels to be inside this story

Two speeds. The water is slow and the land is fast. The draft says so on its first pages - "TIME IS STRETCHED" on p. 2 and "VERY FAST HERE" on p. 3 - and keeps the promise. The surf sequences slow down (pp. 2, 29, 63) and the prose opens up with them, and the scenes on land run: the bank, the chase, the raid, the airport. When the two meet, in the freefall on p. 85, where they "seem to paradoxically hang above the world" at 120 miles an hour, and in the fall on p. 104, the draft is at its most exciting to read.

Colour does the same work. The Bureau is "Data hell. Looks like he got a job at Xerox." on p. 6, and the beach before the recognition is "Vampire morning." on p. 63, drained of colour. The water at night on pp. 49-51 is silver and black. A director gets a palette without having to ask for one.

The comedy lives inside the action, not beside it, and that's what makes the action feel like this film and not any film. The cat underfoot on p. 73. The pit bull on p. 74. The lawnmower that becomes a weapon. It keeps the violence human-sized until the bank on p. 94, where the violence stops being funny, and the change in tone is the point.

The robbery on pp. 91-92 is written from Utah's point of view, handheld, and it's the longest stretch where the script puts us inside his body and not beside him. It's the feel of the whole second half in one sequence. The

quieter pictures - Bodhi sitting on the cliff on p. 77, the board fragment on the sand on p. 110 - are where a director will find the film's stillness. The draft trusts them most when it doesn't explain them.

What the script needs most

One big thing, broken out. The draft needs to decide whether Utah's refusal to take the shot is a choice or something he can't control (the core note). Most of the rest hangs off that answer.

If it's a choice, it gets built in three places that already exist: the day he tails Bodhi (pp. 65-67), the Latigo clue he could catch (p. 49), and the airstrip where his choice kills Pappas (p. 100). If it's something he can't control, it gets built in one place, the stretch from the fog to the tape (pp. 63-87), which needs an obstacle that isn't his own reluctance.

Two things follow whichever way it goes. Tyler's last thirty pages (from p. 78), and the truth under the lie he told her (p. 27), are where the ending gets its cost. And the Razorhead stretch (pp. 34-62) is taking room both roads need.

The page math. Net of the notes: about four pages in, twelve to sixteen pages out, which would put the draft somewhere near a hundred pages. That assumes you take all of it, and I don't expect you to, so treat the number as the outside edge. If you take fewer of the cuts and still want the draft shorter, the middle (pp. 34-62) is where to look. If it comes out lean, the last act between the airstrip and the beach (pp. 101-107) is where added pages would pay.

Why there's no score

A lot of notes services give you a number. I don't. I've never found a metric for something as subjective as "storyline" that measures anything except the person holding the ruler, and new writing is new ideas moving on a current of changing ones. I have been doing this a long time, which means I have a lot of opinions stacked up against each other. If you'd like my biased opinion turned into a subjective measurement of a vague concept like "storyline", I'm happy to provide scores. I'd recommend the notes.

Very minor nit-picky notes

Typos and slips, as written, then the fix. I left out anything that looked like the PDF and not you.

- (p. 15) “come dignity” - some.
- (p. 30) “They call his the Bodhisattva.” - him.
- (p. 63) “crave and slash” - carve.

There are others in the script, a dozen or so, most of them one letter off. A slow read with the sound on will catch them.

Consistency. “Bells Beach” on p. 47 and BELL’S BEACH on p. 108, so pick one. Grommet is 17 on p. 31 and “Eighteen years old.” on p. 95. The slug on p. 52 says BEACH PARKING LOT for a scene on the water. The woman in the vest on p. 43, the black-haired girl in the shower on p. 56 and “FREIGHT TRAIN” on p. 59 read as one woman under three labels, and naming her on first sight would help.

Repetition. “Freight train” as a simile four times (pp. 4, 31, 46, 59) and “like a bull” four times (pp. 13, 60, 72, 101), and there are other repeats in the description, “explosion of” among them. The pop-culture simile - Tom Cruise on p. 33, Pee Wee Herman on pp. 32 and 46, the Silver Surfer on p. 51 - dates the page and hands your image to someone else’s film. Same for the ethnic shorthand in description, “Zulu chief” on p. 8 and “Comanche hair” on p. 30. Describing the thing itself does more.

Formatting is clean. Length is covered above.

Things you could try

I don't write rewrites for people. It's story editing, which is a different job from giving notes, and it means making creative decisions about your story, which are yours. No one has all the answers except you.

What I do give is ways to explore your script and practical means to do it. I'm not saying they produce miracles. They might. What I'm sure of is that they will add to your craft knowledge for this script and for any other you ever write.

One scene, three sizes.

PURPOSE find out what the Razorhead stretch (pp. 34-62) actually needs.

HOW take the hair collection on pp. 35-37 and write it three times - as a couplet, as a quarter page, as half a page. Don't say it's impossible. Try the versions. Then do the same to the stakeout.

WHAT IT GIVES YOU maybe you hate the shorter ones and go back to what you had, but you will know what those pages are for and what to fight to keep.

COST an evening.

The knowledge ledger.

PURPOSE see the structure you built, not the one you outlined.

HOW every scene from p. 31 on, down the left side. On the right, what the audience knows that the people in the scene don't, and what they know that the audience doesn't. The gap between the two is where the tension lives, and the ledger shows you how it moves.

WHAT IT GIVES YOU the draft has two secrets running in opposite directions - Utah knows Bodhi is one of the robbers from p. 63, and Bodhi knows Utah is FBI from some point before p. 87 that the script never fixes - and a clue at Latigo (p. 49) that no one picks up. The marks will show you the film's real structure.

COST an afternoon.

Cut the exposition, three ways.

PURPOSE find out how much of Bodhi needs saying.

HOW take Tyler's speeches about him (pp. 30, 46, 48) and rewrite them three times. Once so no one asks a question. Once so a different character already in the scene gives the information, even if it's a ridiculous choice, just to see how it changes the shape. Once assuming everyone already knows what they learn, so you can cut to the momentum instead of the explaining.

WHAT IT GIVES YOU which of Tyler's descriptions the pictures of Bodhi already cover.

COST an afternoon.

Write the ending twice and read them cold.

PURPOSE settle the choice in the core note, which these notes can't settle for you.

HOW write the beach once where letting Bodhi go costs Utah something, and once where Utah has gone over and the last line is his own, not borrowed. Same paper, so it's hard to tell which is which. Read one, have your reaction. Wait a day. Read the other.

WHAT IT GIVES YOU which Utah you would follow for another hundred pages.

COST two evenings and a day of not looking.

Five things in this story to brainstorm.

Utah's want and his need, as two things. He wants to win - the case, the wave, Tyler, Bodhi. What does he need? The draft has candidates: to lose once and survive it (p. 86), to want something of his own (p. 27, said as a lie), to stop being anyone's quarterback ("Okay, Dad." on p. 42). Pick one and walk every beat against it.

Who the airport scene belongs to. On the page it is Utah's. Try it as Pappas's - the man who chooses not to take the shot because the kid is in the way, and dies for it - and see what Bell's Beach becomes.

What Tyler knows, and when. Right now it is nothing until p. 77, then everything by force. What if she works out Bodhi is Reagan before Utah does?

The character who is missing. Someone in the Bureau who is good and kind, so that leaving costs. Or someone in Bodhi's crew who does not want to die.

The ending, and what it is the cost of. Bodhi's death costs Bodhi nothing he did not want. What does it cost Utah? List everything he has on p. 107 and everything he has on p. 110. If the lists match, the ending has no price.

And a sixth: shift something in who a character is.

Step back and change one element of someone's identity and see what the story does. Bodhi used to be a cop. Pappas has three weeks in the Bureau and Utah has thirty years. Tyler is the one who rides the fifty-year storm. Not because anything is wrong with what you have. I'm just curious to see if brainstorming that way gives you anything that rocks your world more than what you have.

That's the lot. Good luck with the next draft - it's the fun one.

M